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The CIA And Its Discipline

When the head of any public agency that deals exclusively with the safety and security of our country goes as far as writing an unsolicited letter to a newspaper editor, congratulating him for an editorial that criticizes the Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman, he has set a precedent that should be stricken.

This happened when Richard Helms, CIA director, wrote such a letter to the editor of the St. Louis Globe-Democrat commending him for an editorial that criticized Sen. J. William Fulbright, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee. The editor had a perfect right to write the editorial, but the director of the CIA has no right to approve of it publicly. The minute he took the right of office, he gave up his right of free speech.

The reason is obvious. If he has that right, every one of his employees has the same right. If his conduct brings no

more than an apology, a precedent will be set that easily can encourage glib talking and writing by other top security officials and their employees.

This is particularly true of the CIA, whose appropriations and wide scope of duties always must be cloaked with secrecy. As a CIA career man himself, no one knows that better than Mr. Helms. As director of the CIA, he quickly would squelch any letter-writing similar to his own, by one of his lower-echelon employees.

Mr. Helms should be fired in disgrace, as a means of maintaining discipline in his own agency. What is more, Congress should see that it is done. The minute any CIA employee, including the director himself, engages in partisan politics and public letter-writing, his usefulness comes to an end. No director of the CIA, now or in the future, should be held as immune to punishment for deplorable personal conduct.